

The Society of Saint Ambrose

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT AMBROSE

The organization of the Society of Saint Ambrose was effected in 1932, as a result of the conviction in the minds of the organizers that there was a definite need for such a group, wherein likeminded persons might work together in the attainment of common aims, in line with common ideals.

In its Constitution, the Society has adopted certain principles as its object and purpose, and it commends them to the Church as the essential reasons for the Society's existence.

Believing that the Lutheran Church has a real and vital mission in the carrying on of Christ's work, the Society holds firmly to the pure teachings of the Word of God, as they are confessed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It stands solidly on the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and other Symbolical Books contained in the Book of Concord, and it urges other Lutherans to faithfully continue in a like profession.

The Society believes that vital, positive faith, rooted in the Word of God, and nurtured by the real sense of the abiding presence of Christ, the Living Word, is the only effective and incontrovertible antidote for the destructive and unchristian influences of Humanism, Rationalism, and Modernism. These forces have already strongly affected most of American Protestantism, and have even gained a foothold in our own Church. A return to the positive scriptural teachings of the Fathers of the Church is the only thing which can revivify the wavering, uncertain faith of our people.

The Society further believes that this Word of

God, which dwells in a living form in all true Christians, must, of necessity be preached fearlessly, and ceaselessly, for Christ cannot be bound within the believer. He must come forth and reach out to others, through the mediation of that believer. It holds that Gospel-centered, **Christ-centered**, prophetic preaching is one of the greatest needs of the day in our Church, as in all the Churches. Powerful forces are attacking Christ's Church. We, its defenders, must not be found wanting in zeal, in courage, in self-sacrifice. The social fabric of our nation—so torn and broken, so much in need of rehabilitation—must be imbued with the life-giving force of Christ's Gospel. This forward-looking, constructive work the Society urges upon its members as their bounden duty.

The Society devotes itself to the study and cultivation of pure and historic liturgical practices which were imbedded in the very structure of Lutheranism, in the days of its purity, before the inroads of Calvinism, the *Aufklärung*, political meddling by hostile princes, and forced Unionism.

It believes that a rich liturgical practice is the rightful heritage of our Church, and the consistent accompaniment of the Common Service, which finds its sources in the pure Lutheran liturgies of the Sixteenth century. It believes that the trappings of a hard and gloomy Calvinism should be put off, and that the joyful colorfulness of Lutheranism should be restored. The Common Service will appear in its best light when it is used in company with the ceremonies and music which were its inseparable companions in the earlier days of Lutheranism, and which come out of the same long centuries of liturgical development as the Service itself.

The Society interests itself in the proper form and usage of the historic and traditional vestments, music, and ceremonial, applying to them all the infallible test of Scripture. The Word of God must never be hidden or obscured by ceremony; rather, it must be brought out with additional force and greater emphasis.

The Society believes that the aesthetic and beautiful have a definite part to play in liturgical worship. The Church should offer to God its best, in architecture, art, music, and fabric. Nothing cheap or false, no sham, nothing disorderly, has any place in the worship of our Lord. Nothing sensational, or gaudy, or tickling to the popular sectarian fancy should rightfully find a place in the services of our Church.

Vestments, music, lights, incense, a pure ceremonial—all have a place in our Church, which is the outgrowth of the **Conservative** Reformation. The shackles and bonds of sectarianism, put upon Lutheranism by hostile movements and men, or even by misguided members of the Church, should be thrown off for all time. We should return to the goodly things of our Father's House.

In this the Society does not wish to be merely archeological. It desires the restoration of those pious practices and ceremonies which are conducive to edification and inspiration. It sees no reason why these time-honored ceremonies, which have been proven valuable by centuries of use, should not help to satisfy spiritual needs of people in our time, and it believes that where they are properly and earnestly observed, they very definitely are satisfying those needs.

The Society believes that there is a crying need for the restoration of a deeper, richer devotional life among both clergy and laity. It is convinced that through prayer, strength is imparted to feeble men, and courage to weak men—that prayer really changes things. It works toward the renewal of family worship in the home, believing that this creates a communion and comradeship with Christ, a familiarity with His Holy Word, and a greater spiritual solidarity in the family. A praying Church is the only successful Church.

The Society therefore tries to recommend and supply devotional material for its members. It encourages the restoration of the use of the historic "Hours of Prayer", especially among the clergy. It works for the increase of "weekday religion", in place of the prevalent "Sunday religion" of sectarian Protestantism, which has invaded our Church. Our Churches should, if possible, be open daily for prayer and meditation, and there should be a daily service of some kind, adapted to the needs of the congregation.

Believing that the Sacrament of the Altar is truly a Means of Grace, and not merely a memorial, or a sign of profession among Christians, the Society encourages more frequent celebration of the Holy Communion, in keeping with our clear Lutheran doctrine, and consistent Lutheran practice in northern Europe. It believes that the understanding and appreciation of the rich spiritual benefits of the reception of the true Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament have been marred by the generally infrequent communions in our Churches. This practice of infrequent celebrations is certainly un-Lutheran and clearly the result of too much contact

with non-Lutheran groups holding unscriptural doctrines.

Historically and doctrinally, the Holy Communion should be the center and focus of Lutheran worship. It should be free alike of Protestant error and Romish superstition. In contrast to them, it should be pure, both in doctrine and ceremony. It should be vested with due dignity, decency, and honor, and preserved from ceremonial obscurance.

The Society does not believe that absolute uniformity of liturgical practice in our Churches is either necessary or desirable. Our doctrine may be expressed purely in either a simple or in an elaborate ceremonial. (cf. Augsburg Conf., Art VII. "And to the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.") It does not advise that all churches use a ceremonial similar or identical with that used at its own services.

The words of the Augsburg Confession may be quoted in this connection (Article XV): "Of Rites and Usages of the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquillity and good order in the Church, as particular holy-days, festivals, and the like." Also (Article XXIV): "Falsely are our churches accused of Abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained on our part, and celebrated with the highest reverence. All the usual ceremonies are also preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to

teach the people." In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession numerous statements of a similar nature may be found, for example, in Chapter XII: "In the beginning we must again make the preliminary statement that we do not abolish the Mass, but regularly maintain and defend it. For among us masses are performed every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, in which the sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved. And the usual public ceremonies are observed, the series of lessons, of prayers, vestments and other like things."

It does not believe that its action and principles are, or will be, divisive of the Church. It has a high idea and ideal of the Church, and hopes and prays for the unity of our much-divided fold. It believes that the so-called "high" churches should not exhibit, in any form, a spirit of separatism, but rather that they should take an active and vigorous part in the cooperative and general work of the Church, and of its auxiliary organizations, such as the Women's Missionary Society, the Brotherhood, and the Luther League.

The Society does not impugn the motives, or doubt the sincerity of orthodox "low" churchmen, and it respectfully requests that it be accorded a like consideration by those who are not in complete harmony with its practices. As the Formula Concordiae so aptly puts it: "According to this doctrine the churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them, provided they otherwise are in unity with one another in doctrine and all its articles, and also in the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known

saying; 'Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in the faith' ”.

Hoping and praying that its efforts may always redound to the glory of God, and the extension of His Kingdom, the Society earnestly invites the prayers of others to this same end.

SOLI DEO GLORIA!



For further information, address

The Provost, The Rev. A. G. Marcell, S.T.M.

1218 W. Silver Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

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